Jackson Feels Mov ement For New Ray Trial May Originate At Democrat Gathering In City

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WASHINGTON — Rev. Jesse Jackson said Friday it is possible that a crusade in behalf of a new trial for James Earl Ray could be launched at the National Democratic Party's midterm convention in Memphis this December.

Jackson, attending the House Assassinations Committee hearings into the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., said those plans have been discussed in Memphis.

However, a spokesman for a group of Democrats meeting in Memphis to plan for the convention, said the subject of the King slaying has not come up in their sessions although a resolution concerning a new trial for Ray could be presented to the convention.

Jackson said the discussions about a new trial for Ray are being held in abeyance pending the outcome of the assassination hearings. The King hearings recessed Friday and will resume in November.

He said, however, that it is possible the hearings "may be that trial" and that testimony could "blow the whole lid" off the case.

Asked whether the movement will try to get Ray a new trial, Jackson replied, "The hearing will determine that."

Others Friday reported a "Committee for Truth and Justice in Memphis" has been formed by Rev. Thomas Kirk, a Catholic priest in Memphis, and Bishop Carroll Dozier, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Memphis. However Bishop Dozier denied any involvement in such a group. Father Kirk could not be reached for comment.

Memphis lawyer Duncan Ragsdale, the Republican opponent of Rep. Harold Ford, said the committee is reportedly preparing to begin a campaign in Memphis and Tennessee to arouse public support for a new trial for Ray.

Although saying Jackson was more informed than he was, Ragsdale said that Bishop Dozier and Father Kirk were involved.

"He has information that I don't have," Dozier said when reached Friday. "I know nothing about what Duncan Ragsdale is talking about."

Ragsdale said the committee has talked about plans for a "mass march" in Memphis to mobilize support for a new trial for Ray and that Dick Gregory, comedian and civil rights activist, has been asked to come to Memphis and speak for a new trial for Ray.

Susan Morrison, press secretary for the Democratic National Committee, said Friday night, "I have not heard of it at all. It wasn't discussed here tonight" at a meeting in Memphis of 10 members of the agenda committee of the DNC's Mid-Term Conference.

"It would have to be brought to the attention of the entire conference, like any resolution," she said. "It would require the approval of the executive committee to be brought to the floor (for consideration of the conference delegates).

"If the committee rejected it and kept it off the floor, it would require the signature of 25 per cent (or 409 delegates) of the conference delegates."

She said the committee discussed at its meeting at the Hilton Inn Friday night the content of the three days of meetings to be held here in December, including the number of workshops. She said it is hoped President Jimmy Carter and other Democratic Party leaders would attend the sessions. About 10 members of the national party, including Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, attended Friday's meeting.

She said the city's recent labor problems should have no affect on the convention's plans for the December meeting.

"That didn't come up at all," she said. "We have full faith everything will be settled. The elected officials and businessmen in the city have been very helpful and we expect them to be extremely helpful in the future."

Meanwhile, Ragsdale also said he has "discussed" the possibility of representing Ray in a new trial with Ray's attorney, Mark Lane.

"It's been discussed," Ragsdale said outside the House Assassinations Committee room Friday. "I've been told by several people it could be dangerous — my involvement in this thing."

He said that among others, a psychiatrist in Tennessee told him it would be "physically dangerous" to take Ray's case.

Ragsdale said he didn't know what the psychiatrist meant.

"I haven't decided whether I will or not," Ragsdale said about the possibility of representing Ray at a new trial. "I've discussed it with Ray and Ray has expressed an interest in my assisting him."

Ragsdale said Lane would need someone in Tennessee who can practice before the U.S. Supreme Court to defend Ray in a new trial.

Lane repeatedly has voiced belief the FBI conspired to kill King.

A part of that conspiracy theory involves Mrs. Grace Walden, who has said she saw the killer flee a Memphis rooming house near the Lorraine Motel where King was killed.

Ragsdale represents Mrs. Walden, who lives in California.

Ragsdale was in the committee room Friday to see if Ed Redditt, a former Memphis policeman assigned to guard King the day King was killed, would be called to testify.

Ragsdale said earlier this week he would represent Redditt, who had been subpenaed to testify.

Ragsdale stayed around the committee room Friday waiting for Redditt.

"I just didn't want to go back to Memphis and find out he was called to testify and I wasn't around," the Memphis lawyer said.

Jackson, a leader in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) that King once headed, has been talking confidentially with black members of the committee, and with Lane, throughout the week's testimony.

Jackson said Friday he has no doubt a conspiracy existed in King's death.

"They (the committee) are moving toward the conspiracy right now and I'm convinced they will show Jerry Ray (Ray's brother) is involved, as well as the FBI and the Ku Klux Klan," Jackson said.

Jackson contended outside the hearing room that investigators are probably going to show that some "white conservatives" from the southeastern U.S. were involved in the conspiracy to kill King.